

# Regional food destination attractiveness: an exploration of food day-tripper preferences

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## 1 Introduction

Consumers' desire for unique and authentic food experiences has established food as an essential ingredient for travel. Indeed, some consumer groups, such as foodies, have elevated this trend by incorporating it into their daily lives (Robinson & Getz, 2013), giving rise to a new market segment called 'food day-trippers' who plan day trips to nearby destinations to experience local food. As a result, food destinations targeting food day-trippers have emerged. Given the potential for local food to enhance destination attractiveness (Rand et al., 2003), it is likely destinations that establish themselves as regional food destinations will attract food day-trippers. However, despite this potential, scant research addresses regional food destination attractiveness and preferences for regional food from the food day-tripper perspective, a growing market segment that Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) can target (Manimont et al., 2022).

The current paper aims to address this gap by investigating how food destination attributes connect back to food day-trippers' preferences through using a personal values lens. First, it explores the salient attributes that represent food destination attractiveness from the food day-tripper perspective, before investigating how personal values shape food day-trippers' attribute preferences. Repertory Test and Laddering Analysis are used to study these connections and provide valuable insights into the personal values that shape attribute preferences and drive food day-tripper destination choices and behaviour.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Food destination attractiveness

Destination attractiveness and destination image are interconnected concepts and are used interchangeably within the destination marketing literature (Gordin & Trabskaya, 2013). Both concepts address the overall impression or perception individuals have of a destination, based on a range of destination attributes. Destination attractiveness specifically refers to how an individual perceives and feels about a destination's ability to fulfill their travel needs (Pike & Kotsi, 2016). Destination image can be partly attributed to the intangibility of tourism products making consumers

often rely on their mental shortcuts, such as destination image, during their destination selection process (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). This indeed is a critical point because of the concerns around the potential for misperceptions due to the ‘perception is reality’ proposition introduced by Thomas Theorem in the 1920s (Pike et al., 2021). For instance, if an individual perceives a destination as crowded, regardless of whether or not that perception is accurate, they are less likely to consider visiting that destination. This highlights the importance of identifying unique destination attributes and ensuring that consumers' perceptions align with a destination's ability to deliver those attributes, in order to match their expectations (Alahakoon et al., 2021).

DMOs and stakeholders have increasingly focused on food destination attributes due to their perceived ability to enhance a destination's attractiveness and branding success. Previous research has shown the importance of local cuisine in influencing destination choice, directing many destinations to promote and brand their local cuisine as a major attraction. Studies on destination image have examined the link between destination attributes and food destination attractiveness (e.g., Lyu et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2019) indicating attributes such as local cuisine, local markets and festivals, vineyards and cultural heritage play a significant role in enhancing destination attractiveness. Some studies have conducted systematic reviews on food destination research (e.g., Okumus et al. 2018), finding consistently that travelling for food provides an opportunity to immerse oneself in new experiences, so supporting a strong relationship between local cuisine and destination attractiveness (Lyu et al., 2020). However, due to the high diversity in consumers' preferences and the continuous evolution of travel patterns, motivations may have changed over time, hence further research is needed. Moreover, such motivations may go beyond local or regional cuisine to include other related considerations such as accessibility and cleanliness of a destination (Manimont et al., 2022).

## 2.2 Attribute importance and the influence of travel situations on food destination attractiveness

Whilst research on destination attractiveness has expanded, the absence of research that considers the influence of travel situations and practicalities, such as time, duration, and distance, are of concern (Nicolau, 2008; Wynen, 2013). This gap is supported by distance decay theory, which implies the attractiveness of a destination decreases as the required travel time and distance increase (Eldridge & Jones, 1991). Previous research on value perceptions, McKercher (2008) notes that the real issue is not solely the travel distance, but also the cognitive trade-offs between the benefits (consequences) and sacrifices of travelling to a particular destination (Lee et al., 2014). This suggests that the relative destination attributes importance can vary depending on the travel situation.

Applying this to the food tourism context, consumers may view non-context specific attributes (e.g., accessibility, infrastructure, recreational activities) of a destination as more

‘important’ than context-specific attributes (e.g., local cuisine and specialty food) in different travel situations, with only a few ‘salient’ attributes determining their destination choice (Manimont et al., 2022). However, there is little research on this topic in the context of regional food tourism, where travel time and distance are limited for food day-trippers, particularly that of a qualitative nature which engages with consumers and identifies attributes that are most attractive to them. The emergence of food day-tripping as a new travel pattern adds a fresh dimension to food tourism research suggesting a need to understand the specific travel behaviours and motivations of those travellers, including the unique destination attributes that appeal to them.

### 2.3 Destination attributes and personal values

While destination attributes that represent destination attractiveness can provide insights into consumers’ attribute preferences, a more comprehensive understanding of such attribute preferences are facilitated through the study of personal values. Personal values act as guiding principles in an individual’s life (Muller, 1991). The study of such values within tourism uncovers insights into overarching reasons for individuals’ lifestyle choices that guides tourism behaviour. A notion that has been extended to food consumption behaviour (Chan et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022).

One of the earliest studies connecting travel destination attribute preferences and personal values, (Muller, 1991) identified three diverse segments among US outbound leisure travellers to Canada: security-conscious travellers, fun and enjoyment-oriented travellers, and experience-based travellers. These traveller segments were defined by distinct value orientations such as security, excitement, and warm relationships, providing an extended explanation of their attribute preferences. More recent studies exemplified this in food consumption preferences showcasing connections between attributes and values. Chan et al. (2022) establish personal values linked to fast food consumption. Kim et al. (2022) present local food consumption values for different inbound cultural groups, focusing on inbound traveller experiences and the personal values guiding their food experience engagement. However, an explanation of attribute preferences and value orientations of food day-trippers’ who benefit from local knowledge but are bounded by time and distance considerations is still absent in the current literature.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Research approach

A qualitative inquiry using the Repertory Test with Laddering Analysis was employed. First the Repertory Test elicited food destination attributes local travellers perceive as salient for food day-tripping. Then, Laddering Analysis was applied to understand the reasoning behind their preferences

by exploring the resulting consequences and personal values that drive their decisions. These results were then aggregated to understand regional food destination attractiveness as defined by food day-trippers. Methodologically, the present study adapts the steps recommended in studies by Pike (2012) and Alahakoon et al. (2021) given their focus on destination attractiveness.

### 3.2 Sample and sample recruitment

This study focused on self-declared ‘foodies’ (defined as those interested in food and who travel locally to specific destinations for food experiences) living in the counties of Dorset or Hampshire in the United Kingdom. Twenty individuals were recruited with a further condition of them being 18+ years of age. Recruitment was done through personal contacts and snow balling. Sample characteristics are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: A summary of sample characteristics**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Residency</b>		
Dorset	14	70
Hampshire	6	30
Total	20	
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	12	60
Male	8	40
Total	20	
<b>Age</b>		
18 - 24 years	3	15
25 - 34 years	10	50
35 - 44 years	5	25
45 - 54 years	1	5
55 - 64 years	1	5
Total	20	
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	7	35
Engaged/de facto	6	30
Single	7	35
Total	20	
<b>Dependent children at home</b>		
Yes	4	20
No	16	80
Total	20	
<b>Employment status</b>		
Full-time employed	11	55
Self-employed	6	30
Full-time student	3	15
Total	20	
<b>Income status</b>		
Prefer not to say	2	10
Under £10,000	3	15
£10,000-£19,999	1	5
£20,000-£34,999	8	40
£35,000-£49,999	3	15
£50,000-£74,999	2	10
£75,000-£99,999	1	5
Total	20	

### 3.3 Elements and element selection

Nine elements (i.e., destination names) were used for the Repertory Test to replicate real-life destination choices, namely: 1. Bridport, 2. Christchurch, 3. Dorchester, 4. Lyme Regis, 5. Lymington, 6. Poole, 7. Romsey, 8. Southsea, and 9. Winchester. Element selection was informed by three pilot interviews. When introducing the selected elements to participants, triads were used. Accordingly, a combination of three elements at a time were presented to participants eliciting attributes in the form of similarity/difference statements. The order of triad presentation was determined using the balanced incomplete design formula (Burton & Nerlove, 1976). The resulting 84 triad combinations were narrowed down to 24 for practical reasons as advised by Pike (2012). Therefore, the triads of destinations were provided in the following order. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom, and triads were presented in the form of PowerPoint slides following the steps outlined in Alahakoon et al. (2021).

1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6	7, 8, 9	1, 4, 7	2, 5, 8	3, 6, 9	1, 5, 9	2, 6, 7
3, 4, 8	1, 6, 8	2, 4, 9	3, 5, 7	3, 4, 5	6, 7, 8	9, 1, 2	3, 6, 9
4, 7, 1	5, 8, 2	3, 7, 2	4, 8, 9	5, 6, 1	3, 8, 1	4, 6, 2	5, 7, 9

### 3.4 Data collection

Data collection took place between April to May 2022. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom to enable audio/visual interaction. Opening questions clarified participants' self-declared foodie behaviours followed by their top-of-mind regional food destinations. Each participant was then presented triads of destination names with the question 'when thinking about local destinations to visit for food experiences in Dorset or Hampshire for a day trip, in what important way are two of these alike, but different to the third?'. They were also reminded of the 'no repeat rule' to ensure comprehensiveness (Pike & Kotsi, 2016) and 'no wrong answer' to ensure encouragement. For each construct elicited through the Repertory Test, a process of laddering was followed where the question 'why is that important to you' (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) was presented to the participant to ladder up to consequences and personal values. This process was repeated until the participants reached a point of saturation that elicited no new responses from them. Interviews averaged 20 minutes in which participants went through an average of 6 triads.

## 4 Analysis & preliminary findings

### 4.1 Food destination attractiveness

The Repertory Test results present the final constructs in the form of destination image attributes, while the Laddering Analysis shows the resulting consequences and personal values that drive food day-trippers' perceptions. The analysis primarily took the forms of thematic analysis, frequency counts and hierarchical value mapping. Based on this process, firstly participant responses were coded and then grouped together to form relevant themes. This resulted in 32 themes split across Personal Values (10), Consequences (10) and Attributes (12) as shown in Table 2 which includes a summary of frequency counts for each one.

**Table 2: Frequency counts for themes**

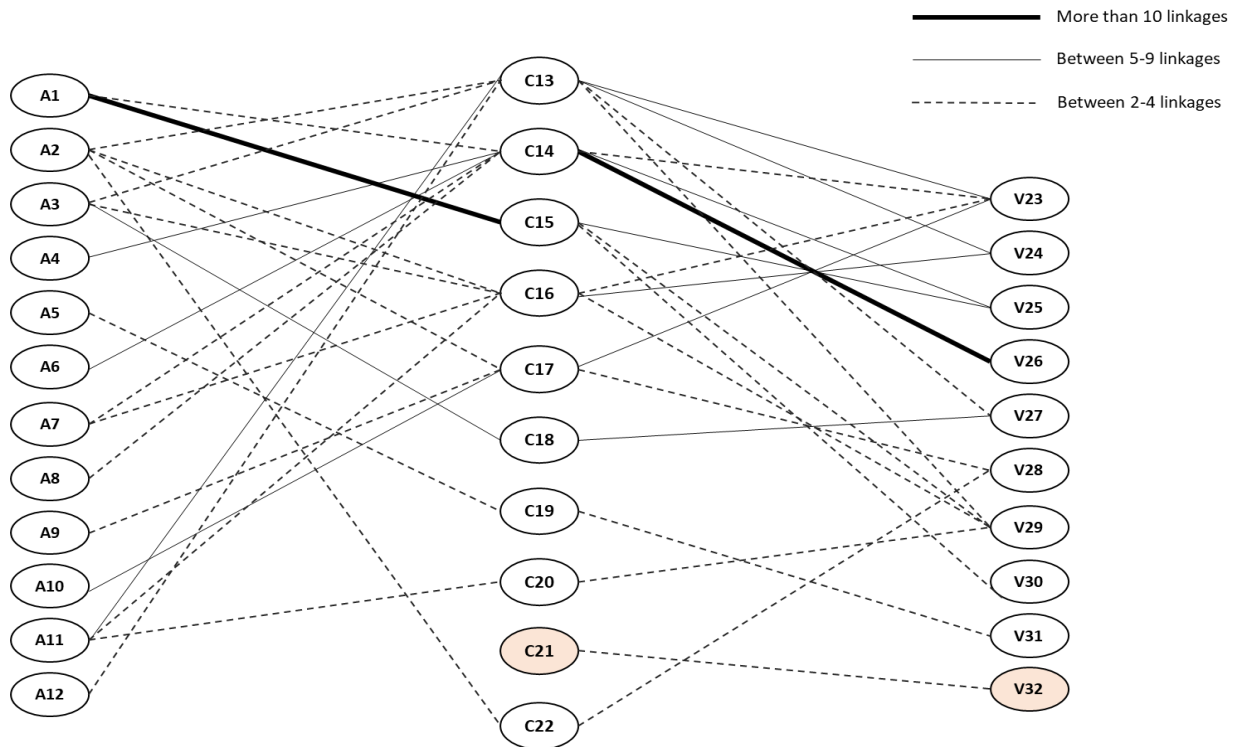
Category	Label	Description	Count (out of 20)
Personal values	V23	Happiness	15
	V24	Excitement	12
	V25	Comfortable life	12
	V26	Sense of security	11
	V27	Wisdom	10
	V28	Inner harmony	8
	V29	Sense of accomplishment	8
	V30	Freedom	5
	V31	A world of beauty	3
	V32	Sense of belonging	2
Consequences	C13	Engaging in new food experiences	15
	C14	Developing a feeling of security/freedom	14
	C15	More time at the destination	11
	C16	Escaping from routine life	10
	C17	Variety in experiences	10
	C18	Reconnecting with history and origins	7
	C19	Appreciating nature	4
	C20	Good value for money	3
	C21	Connecting with locals	2
	C22	Refresh/recharge/relax	2
Attributes	A1	Comfortable distance from home	15
	A2	Close to the sea/beach	12
	A3	History	10
	A4	Previously visited	9
	A5	Natural landscape and attractions	8
	A6	Familiarity	7
	A7	Not previously visited	7
	A8	Urban and city atmosphere	6
	A9	Local markets, events and festivals	5
	A10	Lots to see and do	5
	A11	High-end and quality of restaurants and cafes	5
	A12	Local specialty stores and food	5

Results indicate different categories of attributes representing regional food destination attractiveness. These consist of attributes that are: proximity-based (i.e., A1 comfortable distance from home, A2 proximity to sea/beach), non-food related experiential (i.e., A3 history, A5 natural landscape and attractions), food-related experiential (A9 local markets, events and festivals, A12 local speciality stores and food) and novelty-familiarity considerations (i.e., A6 familiarity, A7 not previously visited). Evidently, regional food destination attractiveness is largely represented by proximity, in that a comfortable distance from home and being close to the sea/beach emerged as salient. This is followed by non-food related experiential considerations dominated by history so aligning with extant studies proposing that culture and heritage contribute to food tourists choice of destination (Kim et al., 2022). Interestingly, novelty considerations among food day-trippers were conflicted, with some recognising previous visitation and familiarity as representing regional food destination attractiveness and others preferring newer destinations. This closely reflects Özdemir & Seyitoğlu's (2017) findings that categorised food tourists as authenticity seekers, moderates and comfort seekers. Overall, in this study regional food destination attractiveness seemingly depends on non-food related attributes as opposed to the suggestion in past research that gastronomic image depends on food-related attributes (e.g. Chang & Mak, 2018).

#### 4.2 Personal values and food day-tripper attribute preferences

In a marketing context where new segmentation bases are sought, perceptual orientations considering food day-tripping uncovers insights into the food destination attributes preferred by food day-trippers, and underlying reasons for such preferences as reflected through personal values. As can be seen from Figure 1, this Hierarchical Value Map (HVM) provides an overview of how personal values drive perceptions of regional food destination attractiveness through the benefits derived from destination attributes.

**Figure 1: The first full hieratical value map (HVM)**



## 5. Initial conclusions & next steps

Initial conclusions suggest a cognitive trade-off between the perceived benefits of a regional food destination and the time and effort required to travel to that destination. Evidently, food day-trippers in this study prioritise proximity and accessibility over other food-related attributes, such as ‘local cuisine’ and ‘quality of restaurants and cafes’. Consistent with prior research on the role of familiarity in destination choice and value perceptions, the novelty-familiarity perceptual orientation in this study suggests that visiting familiar food destinations outweigh the opportunity to seek and engage in new food experiences (Manimont et al., 2022). However, for better comprehension, HVMs will be developed based on the earlier identified attribute categories presenting, proximity-based attributes, non-food related experiential attributes, food-related experiential attributes, and novelty-familiarity considerations. This categorisation will enhance comprehension by presenting the dominant perceptual orientations within this context.



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